



1/24/2011

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Cliff Christian and I am the Director of Government Relations for the American Heart Association and the American Stroke Association. We are here today in strong support for the continuance of the EMS grant program instituted last session under the bi-partisan leadership of Representative Diane Sands and Senator Rick Liabe.

In the last session through the hard work of these two legislators, Montana finally provides volunteer EMS units (covering 80% of Montana's geography), with a stable funding source for the emergency replacement of equipment. Volunteer fire services in Montana have a fairly stable funding source from which they can replace vital equipment on an emergency basis. But that is not the case with our volunteer EMS. EMS units can, occasionally, receive local government funding for initial equipment needs - like the purchase of an ambulance; but volunteer EMS units have absolutely no consistent funding source to replace a blown engine on an ambulance or to purchase life-saving equipment, that is worn out and virtually unusable. Sometimes volunteer EMS units can "sweet-talk" a governmental entity and receive some funds to purchase equipment or replace unusable equipment, but because it is an emergency, many local governments simply don't have the money in their budgets. Other times, if they hit the right cycle, Homeland Security and/or a FEMA subsidiary may come through with the money to buy the emergency equipment. But, at best, these funding sources are sporadic and unreliable for the purchase of emergency equipment

If our volunteer EMTs are to continue to serve this State adequately; to continue their life-saving missions, we, as a State must do better. We need to institute a series of

volunteer EMT recruitment and retention plans and we must find a consistent funding source for these volunteer units to secure the life-saving equipment to do their jobs.

Last session HB 85 requested a fund be established from the Department of Transportation for the purpose of providing emergency equipment grant money to volunteer EMS units throughout the State. The State Department of Transportation is charged by the Federal government when it receives its funding, to mitigate the human and economic consequences of traffic crashes. In his letter to Montanans dated 9-20-06, DOT Director Jim Lynch states, "It will take the committed and sustained efforts of partners in every level of government, tribal governments, in the private sector, and in the 'four E's' of engineering, enforcement education and emergency response – all working together – to achieve success." We could not agree more.

The DOT in its Goals of the Montana Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan needs to (In their words) "Develop an effective and Integrated Emergency Medical Services (EMS) delivery system".

DOT does a good job of working on and improving highway infrastructure and I'm sure no one wants to materially reduce their effectiveness. This grant program simply begins the process, required in the DOT's own Comprehensive Safety Plan, to adopt priority measures to assist EMS in Montana. Last sessions bipartisan legislation compelled the DOT to abide by their own safety documents in assisting volunteer EMS with a grant program. It is the right way to go. Contrary to the assertions of some that claim millions of dollars are available to EMS for the purchase equipment; money for EMS equipment purchases is almost non-existent through Homeland Security, FEMA or even the new Stimulus package being prepared in Congress.

If the Committee decides to support emergency medical services in rural Montana, we will be able to finally provide a stable funding source that will allow volunteer EMTs to continue their life-saving missions. With your concurrence, Montana will be able:

1. To assist Montana's volunteer EMS units that are responsible for 80% of Montana's geography
2. To support the DOT in following their Comprehensive Safety Program calling for a substantial DOT monetary support for EMS
3. To replace badly needed equipment damaged in the performance of their duties
4. To remind the legislative body as a whole that federal funding to assist in the purchase of equipment for rural areas is difficult at best to acquire. Only 2% of Fire Assistance Grants is available to EMS and a General Accounting Office (GAO) audit of EMS funding through Homeland Security funds reported that only 4% of that money went to EMS.

Typical funding sources are very limited for EMS and rural volunteer services find it extremely difficult to compete for what little funds are available.

Our plea to you today is to assist Montana's volunteer EMS units that are responsible for 80% of Montana's geography. There is damaged and unusable equipment scattered all over Montana with absolutely no consistent source from which to purchase the lifesaving equipment. This proposal will get the job done.

Thank you.

Cliff Christian

Cliff Christian

Director of Governmental Affairs
American Heart association
American Stroke Association
1065 Joslyn St.
Helena, MT 59601
cliff.christian@heart.org
406-443-6515